

# RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME VIII No. 4

FALL 1978

*Quarterly*



# “LIVING HISTORY”

by Michael Barbieri, *Lieutenant*

## BENJAMIN WHITCOMB'S INDEPENDENT CORPS OF RANGERS

### *Introduction*

In May of 1975, a small group of men met with the common interest in re-creating an American Revolutionary War unit that had been from and active in Vermont and New Hampshire. After much discussion about which type of unit to re-create, it was decided to research ranger units. Only four units were found that fit the requirements; Bedel's, Herrick's, Hoisington's, and Whitcomb's. Very little was known about any of the four, so the decision was made on the basis of most members liking the name "Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers." After four years of extensive research, the group is very pleased with and proud of their choice.

---

### COVER

Drawn by

William Wigham

Possible clothing based on research into supplies for Whitcomb's Rangers featuring cut down '78 Lottery Coat, cut down hat, mitten on left but turned down cuff on right where trigger finger must be free. Sprig of Evergreen in hat per New England tradition. Country boots and strong shoes. Breeches dyed brown. Coat buttoned double. Week's growth of beard. Belly box for cartridges on waist belt conjectural. Same with sliding bayonet or tomahawk frog.

This should not be taken as a suggestion for a UNIFORM, just one of variety of possibilities.



## BENJAMIN WHITCOMB AND THE ORIGINAL RANGERS

Benjamin Whitcomb was born the second of sixteen children of Benjamin and Dorothy Whitcomb on July 2, 1737, in Lancaster (now Leominster), Massachusetts. The younger Benjamin's great-great-grandfather had come to America in 1629 and moved to Lancaster in 1654.

Whitcomb's introduction to war came during the Seven Years (French and Indian) War when he enlisted in a Massachusetts regiment and went on General Johnson's expedition against Crown Point. He was in the battle of Lake George on September 8, 1755. His next major action came when he enlisted for service with General Amhearst in the expedition against Montreal. During the campaign, Whitcomb was promoted to Lieutenant.

After the Montreal expedition ended, some of the companies returned home over the Crown Point Road to Fort Number 4 at Charlestown, New Hampshire and then on to Massachusetts. The trip across Vermont must have been enjoyable for Whitcomb for on October 12, 1761, he was one of the original grantees of Cavendish, Vermont. He held on to his land until 1764.

By this time, Benjamin Whitcomb had moved to Westmoreland, New Hampshire where he met and married Lydia Howe in 1769. They then moved to Putney, Vermont and on September 16, 1771, sold several acres and a mill in Westmoreland.

In February of 1772, Maidenhead (now Guildhall), Vermont offered a bounty of 100 acres of land to anyone settling and improving it. Whitcomb and his family took advantage of the offer and moved there. On April 10, 1772, he was made a Justice of the Peace in Gloucester County.

Because of the character of frontier life and the distances and differences between northern Vermont and the settled coastland, the growing disagreements with England were slow to reach the upper Connecticut River Valley. Even with the outbreak of armed conflict in the Spring of 1775, little effect was felt in Maidenhead. Then, in the Winter of 1775, Generals Arnold and Montgomery took the War to Canada. On January 20, 1776, the New Hampshire House of Representatives voted "to raise one regiment of soldiers forthwith"<sup>1</sup> in addition to the three regiments already in service. The regiment was given to Colonel Timothy Bedel and headquartered in Orford, New Hampshire.

Benjamin Whitcomb enlisted in Bedel's regiment on January 22, 1776, and was appointed 2nd Lieutenant in Captain Samuel Young's Company. Whitcomb was given the job of enlistment officer and as such, in March, remained in Orford when the regiment was ordered to join the Continental Army in Canada. It wasn't until May that he left Orford with his recruits to rejoin Young's company.

At this time, the defeat of the Canadian campaign was nearly complete and the Continental Army was slowly retiring towards Crown Point. Whitcomb, with his recruits finally rejoined Young's Company at Sorel on June 2. By June 19, the major part of the Army had reached Crown Point but Young's Company was part of the rearguard and was still at Isle Aux Noix. On June 24, while part of the rearguard, Whitcomb was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. The retreat finally came to a halt in July and Bedel's Regiment reported in on July 18.

Because of his experiences in the Champlain Valley during the Seven Years' War, Whitcomb was employed as a ranger and scout between Fort Ticonderoga and the enemy positions around Saint John's and Montreal. It was on one of these scouting missions that Whitcomb was involved in one of the most notorious events of the War and one that served to make his name famous.

Whitcomb had set out with two other men but one had become ill and had to return to Fort Ticonderoga and the other deserted. In spite of being alone, Whitcomb stationed himself alongside the road between Saint John's and La Prairie in order to observe the traffic. On July 24, 1776, a group consisting of a general field officer, his aides, and an escort came down the road. Whitcomb knew the officer was of high position but could not tell his exact rank. He took aim and fired. Because of the smoke and leaves, he could not tell where he hit the officer, only that he did hit him. The escort immediately set out in pursuit but Whitcomb remained in the hollow until the men had rushed by. He then slipped down the bank to a stream and disappeared into the woods. It wasn't until he returned to Fort Ti in early August that Whitcomb learned the full story of his shooting.

The officer was the commander of the First Brigade, Brigadier General Patrick Gordon. On July 26, General Phillips had issued an order describing

---

1) "Historical New Hampshire," Volume 11, Number 2, p. 3.

Whitcomb and telling the British soldiers to hang him or any of his party captured. General Gordon had died on the 1st of August. Subsequently, General Carleton issued a reward of 50 guineas for Benjamin Whitcomb alive or dead. This was the highest reward offered for anyone during the entire War. The British said it was against all rules of war to shoot officers as Whitcomb had and demanded he be turned over. The Americans said that as long as the British used Indians, they had to expect retaliation.

The threat of British vengeance seemed to have little or no effect on Whitcomb. He immediately set out on another scout and returned with much information on the Saint John's positions.

On the 19th of August, Whitcomb received instructions from General Gates for another scouting mission. He was specifically instructed not to shoot anyone else. He set out on the 20th and, in spite of bad weather and being stricken with ague, was to add more notoriety to his name. On September 13, he positioned himself in the same area where he had shot General Gordon. Shortly, two British soldiers came along and Whitcomb captured them. One of the men was a Corporal and the other was Alexander Saunders, the quartermaster of the 29th Regiment. On the return to Fort Ti, the two men did not dare make any attempt to escape for fear of getting lost in the wilderness. The party arrived at Fort Ti on the 22nd and on the 24th, the prisoners were sent to Congress.

As a result of his prowess as a ranger and scout, General Gates recommended on September 30 to Congress that Whitcomb be given command of two companies of fifty men each of rangers. There is some evidence that a Captaincy was offered to anyone capturing a British officer but the original document does not seem to be an official order and may have been written as a joke. In any event, on October 15, 1776, in Congress, the following resolution was adopted: "That two independent Companies consisting of fifty Men each, be immediately raised to be commanded by Lieutenant Whitcomb, who should be appointed Captain Commandant—that he nominate the Officers of the said two Companies, who are to be appointed, when approved of by the Commanding Officer in the Northern Department."<sup>2</sup> Captain Whitcomb chose Captain George Aldrich to command the other company and they set about recruiting the men. Although the two companies never reached full strength, they were officially designated for service at Fort Ticonderoga on November 27, 1776.

Much of the Winter of 1776-1777 was spent in recruiting. Captain Aldrich went to recruit in the Connecticut River Valley in January while Whitcomb remained at Ti. With the coming of Spring and the melting of the snow and ice, Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers began doing their job in earnest. Several times, Whitcomb and his Rangers, with other companies attached to them, were sent out in pursuit of Indian and Loyalist scouting and raiding parties. The Rangers were well known for their own skill at scouting and raiding as shown in a letter to General Gates on May 16, 1777: "... Whitcomb was detached on the 14th Inst. with a party of 150 Men in quest of McCalpins and will I Fancy spare no pains to Fall in with them."<sup>3</sup> In an earlier letter, General Gates had said that if the Tory inhabitants of Tryon Co. give any trouble he would send Whitcomb with 100 men to "whip them into obedience."<sup>4</sup>

---

2) Gates Papers.

3) Ibid.

4) Ibid.

In July of 1777, the British forced the Americans to abandon the Fort Ti-Mount Independence complex. Whitcomb's Rangers retreated with the Army but once positions north of Albany were established, the Rangers began their work again.

When Burgoyne's army came up against the American positions at Freeman's Farm on September 19, Whitcomb's Rangers were attached to Dearborne's Light Infantry Battalion and fought in the first battle of Saratoga. After the battle, the Rangers were moved to Pawlet, Vermont, and were supposed to keep watch on Burgoyne's left flank until General Stark could move into position to cut off the British retreat route to the north. After the surrender of Burgoyne, Whitcomb and his Rangers took up positions in Saratoga.

On November 15, Whitcomb was with General Gates in Albany and was given the following message to deliver to Colonel Bedel in Haverhill, New Hampshire: "Sir—I am desirous you should without delay engage a Regiment of Volunteers, consisting of 500 men Officers included to be commanded yourself as Colonel Mr. John Wheelock as Lieut. Colo. & the Bearor Capt. Whitcomb as Major."<sup>5</sup> This force was to be used in an expedition against St. John's. However, because of political squabbling among Generals of the Army, the plan was abandoned and the regiment ordered to remain for general duty on March 31, 1778.

In the meantime, the Rangers had moved to Rutland, Vermont. This area was the frontier between the United States and Canada and although the Republic of Vermont had some troops there, it was decided best to put Continental troops there. Once Spring arrived, the Rangers commandeered a sawmill and set about building barracks and a stockade fort. This was Fort Ranger and became the headquarters for Vermont troops during the War. During the period that Whitcomb was in Rutland, he was the overall commander. He had under his command several companies of militia, some Vermont rangers, and some of Seth Warner's Regiment, the only other Continental troops in Vermont besides Whitcomb's. This amounted to around 500 men and was formidable enough for British intelligence to keep a regular watch on the post. The duty of the Rangers while at Rutland was to scout Lake Champlain and to the north. In a letter to General Washington on September 15, General Stark states: "The enemy at the Northward have given us no trouble as yet. Major Whitcomb is daily watching their Motions, and often bringing in their Sailors—Four came in the other day. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

The British knew that Whitcomb had been involved with the planned invasion of Canada the previous Winter and were still worried about the possibility of just such an occurrence. In an attempt to discourage, or at least forestall, an invasion, Major Christopher Carleton, the nephew of the former Governor-General of Canada, Guy Carleton, received orders for a secret expedition up Lake Champlain to burn sources of supplies and mills on both sides of the Lake. In late October, the force of around 400 specially-trained regulars set out. The expedition did not remain secret for long and Carleton soon reported seeing canoes going back and forth across the Lake in front of him. These canoes were likely men from Whitcomb's Rangers. It was reported to Carleton that the expedition ". . . had been expected five weeks before at Rutland, that Whitcomb's post was Augmented to five hundred men, . . ."<sup>7</sup>

- 
- 5) New Hampshire State Papers, Revolutionary War Rolls, Volume 4, pp. 150-151.
  - 6) Memoirs and Official Correspondence of General John Stark, p. 189.
  - 7) Haldimand Papers, Major Carleton's Report, Reel # 61.

On a report of a large supply of grain being stored at Moore's Mill in Bridport, Major Carleton sent a party of 60 men to burn it. The party never reached the mill for they encountered some of the Rangers and a sharp skirmish ensued. The raiding party reported only one wounded and that they had heard several cries from a house the Rangers were in and assumed that many were wounded. However, the raiders withdrew and the question arises as to why they would retreat after defeating the enemy and being within a few hundred yards of their objective. Muster rolls for the Rangers report no casualties on that date, November 6, but subsequent deaths may have been as a result of wounds suffered in the action.

Whitcomb and his Rangers remained in Rutland through January, 1779. He was ordered to collect his scattered corps in February and report to Bedel in Haverhill, New Hampshire. In April, Bedel's Regiment was relieved by General Hazen who, with the help of Whitcomb and his men, continued the construction of a road to Canada that had been begun in 1777 by General Bayley. This was to become known as the Bayley-Hazen Military Road.

Along with working on the road, Whitcomb's Rangers began scouting missions into Canada. On many of these occasions, the men would reportedly be "... dressed like Indians ..." or "... in the Canadian manner."<sup>8</sup> The British still thought that an invasion of Canada would be attempted and kept a close watch on Whitcomb's movements. They felt that Whitcomb's scouting into Canada was an effort to lay the way for the invasion. On one occasion, it was even reported that Whitcomb was leading 600 men into Canada by way of Mississquoi Bay. In fact, there were no formal plans for an invasion and the Rangers' scouting missions were solely to gain information on British plans. One of Whitcomb's major sources of assistance in Canada was the Captain of the St. Charles Militia. On several occasions, Whitcomb and his men were aided by this Captain and some of his men.

In September, Hazen's Regiment was ordered elsewhere and the area was left under the protection and command of Major Whitcomb. By the end of October, Whitcomb and the 200 men under his command had occupied the blockhouses that had been built every ten miles along the still unfinished Bayley-Hazen Road. Along with guarding the area, they continued their scouts into Canada.

For some, as yet, unknown reason, Whitcomb went to Morristown, New Jersey and met with George Washington in late November. He returned on December 11 and carried with him orders for Bedel to appear before a court of inquiry concerning charges of mal-conduct in the handling of the quartermaster's and commissary's departments while at Haverhill.

Through casualties, desertions, and enlistments running out, Whitcomb's companies were well depleted by 1780. On January 18, he sent a formal memorial to Washington asking him to ask New Hampshire to fill his companies. The area that Whitcomb was guarding, known as Coös, was frontier and very close to the British forces in Canada. Probably because of this memorial, the New Hampshire General Assembly resolved "That those soldiers that will enlist into Major Whitcomb's Corps of Rangers during the war, shall be entitled to and receive the same pay, cloathing depreciation and other emoluments as other soldiers in the Continental Army."<sup>10</sup> In addition, New Hampshire voted

---

8) Ibid., Reel #92, p. 135.

9) Ibid., Reel #94, p. 66.

10) State of New Hampshire, Proceedings of the General Assembly, p. 857.



on June 22 to raise 120 men to be sent to the Western frontier under Whitcomb's command. The men enlisted for six months and were taken from the various militia regiments around the State. One of the companies reinforced Haverhill and the other was sent to the fort at Northumberland, also called Upper Coös. These additional troops freed the Rangers for more scouts into Canada and also across Vermont to the Onion River and Lake Champlain. Their presence also worsened the supply situation and on August 28, Whitcomb wrote another of his many requests for supplies. This time, however, it was directed not to Congress but to Meshech Weare and New Hampshire.

An attempt was made to capture Whitcomb and claim the reward still on his head in October of 1780. A prisoner named Hamilton had told the British he knew exactly where Whitcomb was. A party of around 300 men composed mostly of Indians set out under the command of a Lt. Horton and guided by Hamilton. When they reached the Montpelier area, they were told that Coös and Newbury, Vermont were strongly garrisoned. They decided they were too few to take Whitcomb which probably was a wise decision as New Hampshire had just reinforced Whitcomb's corps in September. Instead, the raiders turned south through Chelsea and Tunbridge and finally Royalton. They burned much of the settlement, killed a number of inhabitants, and took others prisoner before turning back to Canada.

In January, 1781, orders were sent to Whitcomb from Congress to send his non-commissioned officers and privates to join the Continental Army at Peekskill, New York and the officers were to retire. This was part of a reorganization of the whole army. The orders were not obeyed and on February 25, a memorial from 30 of Whitcomb's Rangers to George Washington asked that the unit not be disbanded and that they be allowed to remain at Haverhill. The memorial was answered on March 12. The request was rejected and the original orders were repeated. This time the Rangers complied and were drafted into Hazen's Corps.

Now that Whitcomb was a civilian, he was free to do as he wished. The War was all but over by 1781 and the British threat to New England was almost non-existent. At the outbreak of the War, it appears that Whitcomb had taken his family back to Westmoreland knowing that northern New Hampshire could turn into a trouble spot. He now brought them back to Coös to settle down.

Even though he was officially out of the War, there was still a price on his head. In early May, an Abenaki chief named Joseph Louis Gill left St. Francis with ten Indians. Their goal was to capture Whitcomb and claim the reward. On May 15, they surprised Whitcomb and Abel Learned near Peacham and captured them. In order to prevent them from escaping, Whitcomb and Learned were each tied to one of the Indians when night came. The last night before they were to reach St. Francis, Whitcomb was tied to Gill. During the night, he managed to escape by taking a canoe that had a gun in it and destroying the others to prevent pursuit. There is evidence that Gill and Whitcomb had known each other before the War and even a story that Whitcomb had saved Gill from dying of exposure one Winter. There is also evidence that Gill was actually working for the Americans. When Whitcomb's escape was discovered, Gill forbade the others going after him and said that God meant Whitcomb to live. When the party reached St. Francis, the Indians with Gill charged him with becoming frightened of Whitcomb's threats to burn his house and village and let him escape. The matter was never pursued by the British.

British intelligence sources constantly maintained a watch on Whitcomb and soon after his capture and escape, it was reported by a spy that he knew of ". . . no intentions in that quarter against this Province (Quebec) except a



motion made by Mr. W. to the People of New Hampshire recommending a party to be detached against St. Francis."<sup>11</sup> The raid was not attempted and Whitcomb spent the rest of the year getting settled and hunting.

Whether it was for revenge, thirst for action, or support for Gill's story when he let Whitcomb escape, Whitcomb was reportedly planning an attack on St. Francis again in May of 1782. This information came from a prisoner that told the British that Whitcomb planned to capture Gill and burn at least his house if not the whole village. The raid, like so many others reported by the intelligence network, never materialized. The reports, whether based on fact or not, did serve to keep Whitcomb's whereabouts a priority on British spy reports. Even Riedesal himself, the commander of the German forces, wrote to Governor-General Haldimand in September of 1782 requesting information on Whitcomb's movements.

By the time of Riedesal's letter, Whitcomb had decided to make a permanent home for himself and his family and on October 24, he bought some land in Lisbon, New Hampshire. He continued a practice he had begun just before the War—that of petitioning for the formation of towns in various areas of Vermont. In all, Whitcomb's name appears on over a dozen such petitions. One of these areas was along a section of the Bayley-Hazen Road and was signed by the men in the Rangers and Hazen's Regiment. No action was taken on any of the petitions.

Whitcomb built the first frame house in Lisbon in 1785. He was to become one of the town's most prominent figures and at one time or another held most public offices. He continued his quest for land but on a smaller scale and dealt in real estate in the Lisbon area.

According to a contemporary officer, Whitcomb was "a presumptuous fellow, entirely devoid of fear, of more than common strength, equal to an Indian for enduring hardship or privation, drank to excess even when in the greatest peril, balls whistling around his head."<sup>12</sup>

A story of the Lisbon area tells of how one day an Indian appeared in town asking questions about Whitcomb. Some neighbors told Whitcomb of this but he didn't seem to be worried. One day, Whitcomb took his gun and went hunting. A single shot was heard later that day. Soon, Whitcomb returned empty-handed which was a rare sight. Time passed and the Indian and the hunting incident were forgotten until one day some boys were playing in a cave and made a terrifying discovery. On the floor of the cave was a skeleton of a man. The skeleton still had remnants of clothing on it—that of an Indian.

Benjamin Whitcomb applied for a pension in 1818 and was awarded \$240 a year. At the time of his application, he had personal property valued at only \$49.74. In order to avoid letting the State take much and to get a higher pension, he may have given most of his property to his six children. Eventually, all the Whitcomb children except Ruth moved away. Ruth remained in Lisbon to care for her parents.

Major Benjamin Whitcomb died on July 22, 1828, at the age of 91. He was buried next to his wife, who had died in 1823, and with many of his war-time comrades in the Salmon Hole Cemetery in Lisbon.

---

11) Haldimand Papers, Reel # 62, p. 62.

12) Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society, "Frye Bailey's Reminiscences."



---

*Re-created Whitcomb's Rangers 1975-?*

The re-created Whitcomb's Rangers is a non-profit educational organization. The group asks for donations for its' appearances. These cover the operating costs of the unit. Each member pays a yearly dues for himself and family and receives a monthly newsletter called the "Morning Report." The name refers to rangers being used as night pickets and giving their report when they came in the next morning.

The families are encouraged to participate and many do. They add realism by demonstrating crafts, cooking, women's and children's clothing, etc. In many instances, some of the women and older children have been on the battlefield, tending the "casualties" or carrying ammunition, or with the unit in parades or long marches. One of the women's chief duties is managing the Food Committee. At events, the women prepare a large meal and each participant or family contributes food or money.

The unit is constantly adding to its' 18th-Century encampment. This has become the focal point of most of the group's activities during events. All meetings take place there and information and duty rosters are posted on a board. Most meals are prepared 18th-Century style in the encampment and many members sleep in the tents. This has added a dimension to the unit that it did not have in the beginning.

The first meetings of the re-created Whitcomb's Rangers were very important in the development of the unit. Many decisions were made that still govern the unit even after acquiring years of experience, new members, and many pages of research information.

One of the most crucial decisions concerned the unit's clothing and equipment. Nothing was known at the time about what the original Rangers used. It was decided to allow members to use any civilian or military items, with the emphasis being placed on practicality and variety. The reasoning was two-fold: 1) The type of duty the Rangers were involved with would have led them to discard anything that was not very useful; and 2) Being a small unit on the frontier, they would have been among the last units to receive anything but the essential supplies and would therefore have had to make do with whatever they could acquire by any means including plundering.

Since they were constantly on scouts for extended periods of time deep into enemy country, they probably would not have used any bright metal or colors that would attract someone's eye. As a result, The re-created Rangers use browns, greens, black, and greys to a very great extent. All brass is allowed to tarnish or is covered and the steel musket parts are browned, the 18th-Century equivalent of bluing.

There were several choices for a manual of arms. The most popular for the Americans, Von Steuben's, was almost immediately ruled out because the unit was formed in 1776 and Von Steuben's Manual didn't come into use until the Winter of 1777-1778. The choice was to use the British 1764 Manual of Arms. The reasoning was that it was taught to many militia companies before the Revolution and many of the men probably were already familiar with it. The unit acquired a copy of a version for troops in North America and printed by H. Gaine, New York in 1775.

The chain of command was the subject of much discussion. Some wanted to have high-ranking officers but the majority felt that since the group was going to be small, it would be best to have just one sergeant. It was also decided that since Benjamin Whitcomb never went above Major, the highest rank anyone would have would be Captain and the command would symbolically remain with Whitcomb.

Above all, the consensus was to strive for authenticity. It was felt that in order to be invited to events sponsored by other units and to be asked to appear at events sponsored by civic organizations, the members should expect to become 18th-Century soldiers when at events. When new clothing or equipment was going to be purchased or made, it was suggested that the authenticity of the item be confirmed. In that manner, although the authenticity may make the initial cost higher, the member could be sure he would not have to buy or make another at a later date. For this purpose, the unit began, and continues, searching for sources of authentic finished products as well as patterns to make items.

For the first two years, there were only six to ten members. Of the fifteen or more at the initial meetings, only three or four remained. The treasury was very small and the organization very loose. With the passage of time, the quality and the reputation of the unit began to grow. Direct results were a growth in

membership, events, and the treasury. This necessitated a more formal organization and one of the first steps was to incorporate in Vermont. This was done in April of 1977, and shortly after, the unit registered with the Internal Revenue Service.

Whitcomb's Rangers joined the New Hampshire Brigade of Colonial Forces, an organization of mostly New Hampshire units, in the Summer of 1976. In October, it was decided to apply for membership in the Brigade of the American Revolution, a national organization of re-created units equipped and trained as the original unit. Only proven authentic items may be used. Whitcomb's Rangers were inspected at the Bennington Battle Site in New York in August, 1977, and accepted as Probationary Members in October of that year. Membership in both these organizations added many events to the calendar and gave the unit much more experience and exposure.

The number of events has grown steadily every year. The first year, there were only two or three events. Most of the time was spent drilling and acquiring equipment. The second year was busier and the unit began to meet other units and to spread its' name. Perhaps the most important year for the Rangers was 1977. In that year, Whitcomb's Rangers were given permission to organize the 200th anniversary celebration of the Battle of Hubbardton. The end result of many hours work was over 200 British and 400 American troops participating in a large 18th-Century encampment and two battles, one early Sunday morning July 10, at the hour of the original battle, and one in the early afternoon. Each battle was viewed by two- to three-thousand spectators. Many participants, from all over the country, said it was one of the best events they had ever been in. Most spectators were awe-struck as they had never seen a large re-created battle before, Hubbardton being the first in Vermont. For the Rangers, it spread their name even more.

On August 3, 1977, in the Senate of the United States, Senate Resolution 241 was passed. This was a resolution commending Whitcomb's Rangers for their "continuing educational efforts in connection with the Revolutionary War." It was presented on the anniversary of the Battle of Bennington in which some of the original Rangers took part. On the weekend of the celebration, August 13-14, Whitcomb's Rangers participated in the re-enactment in Bennington and then travelled to the original site in New York and took part in the celebrations there with the Brigade of the American Revolution.

Other Bicentennial re-enactments that the Rangers have been in include Trenton and Princeton, New Jersey in January, 1977; Monmouth, New Jersey in June, 1978; Battle of Rhode Island in August, 1978; Cherry Valley Massacre, New York in October, 1978; and Moore's Mill, Bridport, Vermont in November, 1978 (this was organized by Whitcomb's Rangers and was an action that the original Rangers were in).

In the ensuing years, Whitcomb's Rangers had grown to over twenty members from four states. The calendar has grown to the point where the members could be doing something almost every weekend of the year. Several members have been involved in and enjoy Winter events. In February, 1978, the unit participated in a re-enactment of a Seven Years War battle at Fort William Henry in Lake George, New York, and a day of war games the following day. In February of 1979, the unit did a day-long scout of Mount Independence. This included some war games with a similar unit from New York.

War games have also become a favorite with the unit. In these events, there is absolutely no pre-planning of action as there is in all other re-enactments. The conditions are exactly as if it were war except that blanks are used.

The participants gain more of an insight into the feelings of 18th-Century soldiering than any number of planned re-enactments could give. The unit hopes to form an association with other units interested in war games and have a series around the Northeast.

During the Winter of 1978, the unit became associated with the 2nd Battery, Vermont Light Artillery, an historical association. The goal was set to form "The Vermont Line and Militia." This would be an organization of Vermont units that would sponsor events around the State and promote the activities and growth of similar units.

For the future, the unit hopes to continue to expand its' membership and scope of activities. In addition to participating in re-enactments, war games, and parades, the unit hopes to develop a movie- or slide-illustrated talk on the life of the Revolutionary War soldier. This would be presented to civic organizations, historic associations, private clubs, schools, etc. Some members have already done this on a limited scale. The unit has found encampments open to public tours and questions to be much more enjoyable than first thought. The re-created Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers has matured and is now truly "living history."



### *A Note About Sources*

When we began our research, we found that there had been extremely little written about Benjamin Whitcomb or his Rangers. Our first information came from these few articles written by other historians. However, as we progressed, we began finding information in period documents that many times proved the historians to be wrong. As a result, we decided to use only primary sources and take note of the findings of others only for interest and comparison.

Following is a list of the primary sources that were used to compile our information along with the place where we obtained the use of the documents. The editor's name, if any, appears in the parenthesis.

- American Archives (by Peter Force) . . . Dartmouth College Library
- The American Journals of Lt. John Enys (by Elizabeth Conetti) . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Correspondence of the American Revolution (Jared Sparks) . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Fort Ticonderoga Bulletin . . . Rutland Free Library
- Gates Papers . . . New York Historical Society
- Haldimand Papers . . . Canadian Public Archives and Dartmouth College Library
- Journals of Congress . . . Glens Falls, New York, Library
- Letters From America (translated by Ray Pettingill) . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Letters on the American Revolution (F. Kirkland) . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Letters to Washington (Jared Sparks) . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Lieut. Digby's Journal . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Lieut. Hadden's Journal . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Memoirs and Letters and Journals of Major General Reidesal . . . Glens Falls, New York, Library
- Memoirs and Official Correspondence of General John Stark . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Memoirs of My Own Times, General James Wilkinson . . . Dartmouth College Library
- New Hampshire Historical Society Collections . . . New Hampshire Historical Society Library
- New Hampshire State Papers . . . New Hampshire Historical Society Library
- Papers of the Continental Congress . . . Dartmouth College Library
- Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society . . . Rutland Free Library
- Public Papers of George Clinton . . . Vermont Historical Society Library
- Travels Through America, Thomas Anbury . . . Dartmouth College Library
- United States National Archives, Washington, D. C.
- Vermont State Papers . . . Rutland Free Library
- Washington's Writings . . . Dartmouth College Library

Following is a list of the men in Whitcomb's Rangers. During the course of the War, Whitcomb had over three-hundred men under his command but most of them were in companies that were raised for short terms or to free the Rangers for scouting. Therefore, only the men in Whitcomb's and Aldrich's companies are listed.

After each name is the company (W—Whitcomb, A—Aldrich), rank other than private, when enlisted, and disposition, with date, other than discharge at dissolution of unit (K—killed, C—captured, D—died, d—deserted, dc—discharged, R—reduced, r—returned to duty).

|                                                      |                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Samuel Agaton (Ajaton)—W, 2/77, d-7/77               | James Lary (Larey, Leary)—W, Drum, 12/76                 |
| Francis Akeley (Akely)—W, 2/77                       | Noah Leavings—W, 3/80                                    |
| George Aldrich—A, Capt, 11/76                        | Thomas Lyford—W, Lt, 11/76                               |
| Robert Barkley—W, 4/77, dc-11/80                     | Edward Mardan (Mardean, Marden)—W, 12/76                 |
| Abner Barlow—W, 12/76, C-10/80                       | John Martin—W, 11/76                                     |
| Robert Bartley (Bartly)—A, 4/77                      | William Martin—W, 12/76                                  |
| Simon Berry—W, 5/80, d-2/81                          | Jonathan Newland—A, 1/77, d-1/78                         |
| John Billings—A, 12/79                               | Jonas Newton—A, 2/77, D-9/77                             |
| Josiah Blodget—W, 12/76, C-6/79                      | James Perry—A, Serj, 2/77, D-4/80                        |
| Thomas Blodget—W, 12/76, K-10/77                     | Moses Perry—W, 1/81, d-2/81                              |
| Enoch Bowen—W, 1 or 6/80                             | Asa Pratt—A, 1/77                                        |
| John Boynton—W, 1/80                                 | John Randall—W, Corp, Serj, 11/76, d-7/77                |
| William Briant (Bryant)—W, 11/80                     | Abel Rice—A, Serj, 2/77                                  |
| Jonathan Burbank—W, 3/80, d-1/81                     | Jeduthan Roberts (Robards)—A, 2/77                       |
| Josiah Burbank—W, 3/77                               | Perley Rogers—W, 3/80                                    |
| Jonas Butterfield—A, Lt., 12/76, dc- 2/80            | Eleazer Rosebrooks (Rosbrook)—W, Serj, 11 or 12/76       |
| Nathaniel Carpenter—A, 2/77, dc-12/80                | James Rosebrooks (Rosbrook)—W, 12/76, dc-1/81            |
| Abiel Chandler—W, 1/81                               | John Row—W, 11/76, d-2/80                                |
| Joseph Chandler—W, 11/76, d-6/79                     | Jeremiah Sahwell—W, drum, 1/77, d-2/78                   |
| Samuel Clark—W, Corp, Serj, 2nd Lt, 2/77, 1/81       | Jonathan Sanders (Saunders)—W, Serj, 11/76, dc-1/81      |
| Acquila Cleaveland—A, 2/77, K-6/77                   | Manassah Sawyer—A, Corp, Serj, 2/77                      |
| Michael Coffin (Coffeen)—W, 3/77, D-3/80 or dc-11/80 | James Sinclair—W, Corp, 12/76, d-6/79, r-5/80            |
| Philip Cromett (Crommit)—W, 12/76, d-7/78            | Joseph Sinclair—W, 12/76                                 |
| William Crown—W, 11/76, D-7/77                       | Samuel Smith—W, Corp, 11/76, d-3/79                      |
| Joshua Danford—W, Serj, 2/77, R-11/80                | Samuel Stevens—W, 8/79, dc-8/80                          |
| Joseph Fifield—W, Corp, 11/76, dc-11/79              | Nathan Taylor—W, Lt, 2/77, dc-12/79                      |
| Samuel Fifield—W, 12/80                              | Urijah Temple—A, Corp, Serj, 12/76                       |
| Haynes French—W, 3/78, dc-1/80                       | Jonathan Thomas—W, 1/81                                  |
| David Goodenough—A, 2nd Lt., 2/77, dc-7/77           | Jesse Thompson—A, 2/77, dc-12/79                         |
| Dennis Hefferin (Heffren)—W, 11/76, dc-2/81          | Moses Thompson—A, Corp, 2/77                             |
| John Hodgdon—W, Corp, Serj, 11/76                    | Samuel Thompson—W, 11/76, d-3/79, r-1/80, d-1/80, r-5/80 |
| Joseph How (Howe)—A, drum, 1/77                      | Henry Tibbets (Tibbals)—W, 3/78, dc-1/80                 |
| Moses Hunt—W, fife, 1/77                             | Nathaniel Whitcomb—A, 12/79                              |
| Benjamin Johnson—A, 11/80                            | Artemas Witt—A, 12/76, dc-12/79                          |
| Nathaniel Knowles—W, 3/77                            |                                                          |
| David Ladd—W, 11/76                                  |                                                          |



**RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
101 CENTER STREET, RUTLAND, VERMONT**

The Society publishes the *Quarterly* for its members with the aim of preserving and studying the history of the Rutland community, which is comprised of the Towns of Rutland, Proctor and West Rutland and the City of Rutland. The Society maintains and operates a museum at 101 Center Street, Rutland, in the former Bank of Rutland building (built in 1825), now owned by the City of Rutland and leased to the Society at no charge.

*Membership*

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of dues to the Assistant Treasurer—

John Diodati, 16 Cottage Street, Rutland, Vermont 05701.

Dues are \$2.00 per year for regular members; for those wishing to give the Society further support, a contributing membership is \$10.00; a business membership is \$25.00; a sustaining membership is \$100.00; and a life membership (one payment only) is \$75.00.

All members receive as part of their membership four issues of the *Quarterly*. The expiration date of each membership is listed on the mailing label of the publication. Members wishing to pay two or more years dues in advance are encouraged to do so to reduce costs.

---

Gifts or bequests of money or articles of local historical interest are welcome at all times and are deductible for income tax purposes.

---

*Editor:* Michael Barbieri

*Sketches:* Steve Halford

Based on clothing and equipment  
researched and used by the re-created Rangers

**RUTLAND  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
101 Center St.  
Rutland, Vt.  
05701**

|                                |
|--------------------------------|
| <b>NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION</b> |
| <b>U. S. POSTAGE</b>           |
| <b>PAID</b>                    |
| <b>Rutland, Vermont</b>        |
| <b>Permit No. 12</b>           |